



PORTUGUESE SELF-INITIATED EXPATRIATES AND THEIR SOCIAL NETWORKS: COMPOSITION, DIVERSITY AND ROLES

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i. Biographical information

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ii. Acknowledgments

I dedicate this dissertation to my lovely daughter, Beatriz. Her joy and endless affection were my energy to complete this endeavour. It is my expectation to teach her never to give up on her dreams.

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iii. Abstract

The global labour market requires the international mobility of many qualified professionals and Portuguese self-initiated expatriates are responding affirmatively to that call. An exploratory study was conducted to describe the social networks that Portuguese self-initiated expatriates establish at the host country: composition, diversity and roles. It presents data derived from semi-structured interviews to Portuguese qualified self-initiated expatriates. Overall, results show (1) the absence of a diaspora-based network, (2) the strength of the networks based in the host country and (3) the existence of one prevailing contact that is the strongest knot in the social network. Suggestions for further research and contributions for employers and prospective Portuguese self-initiated expatriates are also included.

Keywords: self-initiated expatriation, Portuguese self-initiated expatriate, social networks

iv. Resumo

O mercado de trabalho global requer a mobilidade internacional de muitos profissionais qualificados e os expatriados voluntários (*self-initiated expatriates*) portugueses têm respondido afirmativamente a esse desígnio. Conduziu-se um estudo exploratório para descrever as redes sociais construídas pelos expatriados voluntários portugueses no país de destino: composição, diversidade e papéis. São apresentados dados recolhidos a partir de entrevistas semiestruturadas com expatriados voluntários portugueses com habilitações de nível superior. Globalmente, os resultados mostram (1) a ausência de uma rede criada a partir da diáspora portuguesa, (2) a força das redes com base no país de destino e (3) a existência de um contacto dominante que é o nó mais importante da rede social. Incluem-se ainda sugestões de investigação futura e contributos para empregadores e potenciais expatriados voluntários portugueses.

Palavras-chave: expatriação voluntária, expatriado(a) voluntário(a) português(esa), redes relacionais

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1. Introduction

The world is nowadays a sum of large economic spaces characterised by the intersection of people, goods, economic activity and money across national borders (Huwart and Verdier, 2013). This phenomenon, named globalisation, goes beyond a mere internationalisation of production and services and is also characterised by workplace changes and people mobility. Thorn (2009) summarises the movement of human talent across a global labour market as inevitable and challenging for both organisations and individuals. From the employers' perspective, there is a worldwide recruitment pool; from the workers' perspective, career, travel and lifestyle opportunities are not limited to the homeland offer (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010).

Globalisation is thus inextricably associated with professional mobility, and this international trend is also felt in Portugal. According to the OECD International Migration Outlook 2013 (OECD, 2013a), Portuguese emigration has accrued over the last few years with roughly 70 000 departures per year.

While available data treat the migrant population as a whole, regardless of any idiosyncrasies, a growing body of literature suggests the emergence of alternative forms of expatriation (McKenna and Richardson, 2007; Selmer and Lauring, 2011). Traditionally, emigrants relocate to a foreign country for economic and/or political reasons and their movement is permanent, as most do not have a clear intention of returning, meaning that the person is expecting to settle and live in the host country (Thorn, 2009). To date, a fine-grained description of mobility sheds light on other international assignees, namely, corporate expatriates and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). A corporate expatriate is a “traditional long-term expatriate sent overseas for a 3-5 year period” (McKenna and Richardson, 2007, p. 307) whereas self-initiated expatriates relocate “without organizational sponsorship...but of whom there are many thousands circulating throughout the global economy” (McKenna and Richardson, 2007, p. 307). As SIEs are numerous among the migrant population (Myers and Pringle, 2005; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010), it is reasonable to assume that the increasing number of departures, corroborated by Statistics Portugal (INE, 2013), includes not only emigrants, but corporate expatriates and SIEs.

In parallel with the scant statistics on SIEs, in the realm of mobility, researchers have focused their interest primarily on migrants and corporate expatriates. As a consequence, SIEs remain an understudied group (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Shen and Kram, 2011). In addition, they have been referred in the literature under different names, which reveals a lack of construct clarity (Doherty *et al.*, 2013). So far, the efforts to better understand SIEs have been focused on their profile, specially underlining what distinguishes SIEs from other international workers, their motivations for mobility, their career type and repatriation (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty *et al.*, 2013). These research lines have studied SIEs at an individual level, so recent theorisations have heightened the need for a comprehension of SIEs in context (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty *et al.*, 2013). SIEs are integrated in social groups, either personal or professional. However, the interactions within those networks are yet to explore as far too little attention has been paid to SIEs social ties and social support (Johnson *et al.*, 2003).

For the purpose of this study SIEs are defined as tertiary educated Portuguese workers who, at some stage of their career, decide to finance their own relocation to a destination of their choice pursuing professional and personal development, without a pre-defined duration. It has been established that SIEs decide to move and work abroad (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2012) and are hired under local, host country contracts (Crowley-Henry, 2007; Lo *et al.*, 2012). Yet, their relocation is temporary because they plan to return home at some time (Thorn, 2009). Thus, SIEs are known for their self-directedness (Doherty, 2012; Lo *et al.*, 2012), not only regarding the decision to relocate and career development, but also regarding the local interactions, which are instrumental to obtain social support (Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2008; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011).

In fact, what is known about the challenges related to SIEs' cultural transitions vis-à-vis corporate expatriates' cultural transitions is much less (Froese, 2012). As they have no corporate support (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010), social networks are expected to have among SIEs an added influence, whether on the decision to relocate, on career development or on adjustment, though not much has been explored so far. Despite being valuable international human resources (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Cao *et al.*, 2012), SIEs are mostly unknown. In Portugal (and elsewhere) SIEs have often been

mixed with migrants, which is a disregard for their specificities, namely the fact that they are highly qualified workers (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty *et al.*, 2013) who do not aim to relocate permanently.

Accordingly, this study addresses the development of Portuguese SIEs networks and their perceived roles. In particular, it aims to answer the following research questions:

- (1) Who belongs to the social networks at the host country?
- (2) How diverse are those networks in terms of nationalities? (2a) How important is the Portuguese diaspora?
- (3) Which roles do the interpersonal and organisational contacts play?

These questions guide this study in order to enlighten the networks established by Portuguese SIEs, their composition, diversity and roles.

This manuscript is structured as follows: in the following sections, prior literature relevant to this study is reviewed. The topic of Portuguese SIEs, which provides a context for this research, is also addressed. The subsequent sections provide an overview of the methodology, followed by a description of the findings of the study and their discussion. Conclusions, including suggestions for future research and both theoretical and practical implications, are provided in the final section.

2. Self-initiated expatriation

An expatriate is “someone who left his or her homeland to live or work in another country, usually for a long period of time” (Vance, 2005, p. 375). However, this definition is too vague to embrace the multiple forms international work can take, so research aims at better labelling and delimiting each type of foreign experience (Shaffer *et al.*, 2012).

Inkson *et al.* (1997) contrasted two types of international work – expatriate assignment and overseas experience – in terms of initiation, goals, funding and career type. These authors draw attention to the fact that most expatriates around the world are not sent away by their employers, they rather decide on their own to work at a foreign country. This delimitation opened a new line of research that enlightens the differences between company-backed expatriates (Doherty *et al.*, 2011) and self-directed expatriates (Felker, 2011).

Suutari and Brewster (2000) expanded this seminal contribution and stressed the initiative as the defining characteristic: expatriate assignment happens within the corporate environment whereas in self-initiated foreign work experience the individual decides to leave the country. They add – summarising the findings from Inkson *et al.* (1997) – that in terms of goals, corporate expatriates have to complete an organisational project while SIEs have individual motives. Regarding funding, unlike corporate expatriates, SIEs have to fund the transfer by themselves. Lastly, a corporate expatriate is focused on an organisational career while a SIE engages in a boundaryless career and has to manage the repatriation arrangements as well (Doherty, 2012).

The literature continued to revisit the differences between corporate expatriates and SIEs, emphasising that SIEs do not receive organisational assistance of any kind from a home country organisation (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Biemann and Andresen, 2010; Crowley-Henry, 2007; Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010) and are not told (when) to come home.

To sum up, organisational expatriates are sent abroad to a subsidiary for a pre-determined period of time in order to fulfil a task and they make all the efforts to achieve the goal the company sets them so to improve their careers and their earnings, knowing that a relocation package is waiting back home (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009).

SIEs, on the contrary, make their own decision to move and work at a foreign country and that choice is based on personal reasons that lead them to zigzag careers that, at some point, might bring them back to the home country, at their own expenses (Lo *et al.*, 2012).

Although the comparison between SIEs and corporate expatriates seems to dominate the literature, the conceptualisation of SIEs as a subgroup of international workers has been established by making additional comparisons with other populations. Doherty *et al.* (2013) provide a comprehensive look at internationally mobile individuals, concluding that they present both similarities and differences, depending on the dimensions under analysis: initiation, goals, funding, focus, career agenda, intended duration, employment and occupation category. As a result, SIEs are proven distinct from short-term sojourners and migrants (Selmer and Luring, 2010).

According to Peltokorpi and Froese (2009), SIEs have close, long-term relationships with friends, spouses or relatives living in the host country and this characteristic distinguishes them from other sojourners that are merely short-term travellers (Selmer and Luring, 2011) whose assignments last less than one year (Bonache *et al.*, 2010).

As far as contrasting SIEs with migrants, the latter move for either economic or asylum motivations (Crowley-Henry, 2007; Zikic *et al.*, 2010) and aim at permanent stays, hence accepting a full transfer of their lives to another country (Zikic *et al.*, 2010), while SIEs plan their international work experiences to be temporary (Doherty *et al.*, 2013). Thorn (2009) corroborates that the length of the stay is the key difference between SIEs and migrants, whereas Al Ariss (2010) points out that apart from the forced/chosen reasons to move and the duration of the stay, there are two additional features that separate migrants from self-initiated expatriates. SIEs do not fit the pendulous movement from developing countries to developed countries and they are socially accepted and welcomed by the host country. The author readdresses this topic to stress that the literature depicts migrants as less advantaged in terms of competencies, nationality and ethnicity (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013); and as a consequence, migrants are labelled so because they do not come from privileged backgrounds where they would have the chance to self-initiate their mobility (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013).

The rapid pace of change in today's global world promotes the establishment of new forms of international work (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2004) and recent studies show that the majority of the expatriate population can be classified under SIEs (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2012). Throughout this study self-initiated expatriation will refer to all international assignments arranged and initiated by skilled professionals that are individually motivated to take the lead of their career and fund a temporary stay abroad, engaging in foreign employment opportunities (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Cao *et al.*, 2011; Doherty *et al.*, 2013).

In recent years, there has been a noteworthy amount of literature on the profile of the SIE. The first attempts approached self-initiated foreign experiences from a culturally-based perspective. Myers and Pringle (2005), for instance, refer to those international experiences as overlapping a New Zealand tradition according to which youngsters travel overseas to explore different cultures and to reflect upon their options, taking some jobs along the way but with no strategic career purpose. Gradually, however, the literature started to address self-initiated expatriation as a valid career choice. The effort to understand SIEs goes now beyond an analysis of who moves abroad and there is a clear attempt to understand why people move (Cerdin and Le Pargneux, 2010).

Shaffer *et al.* (2012), for instance, are responsible for a meta-analysis of global work experiences, summing up what is known about corporate expatriates (including traditional corporate expatriates, flexpatriates, short-term assignees and international business travellers) and SIEs. The outcome of their conceptual framework makes it possible to draw the current outline of the profile of a SIE: prior to the decision to leave the country, SIEs take into consideration the cultural proximity and the security of potential destinations, together with the living conditions, the status of the place and the reputation of its inhabitants. Furthermore, SIEs tend to be young people, with less family responsibilities and free from the work-family conflicts that usually assist corporate expatriates. Individuals driven by the excitement of a challenge and/or previous international experiences – either personal or professional – are more likely to engage in what they believe is an opportunity that will pay off in terms of development, acquisition of global career competencies and financial progression. This is mainly a male perspective, although women do start their own expatriation process more often

due to a lack of compatible opportunities in their home countries. According to the same meta-analysis, SIEs are generally willing to embed in the local culture and overcome the stress factors emerging from such a life-changing event. Nonetheless, major shocks might make them consider returning home. Being a SIE is demanding in terms of career building because the individual has to manage his/her professional path, from the maintenance of the motivation levels to the resolution of administrative contingencies and situations triggered by prejudice or stereotypes. Additionally, a stronger fit between the SIEs' competencies and the job(s) performed leads to a fainter repatriation intention (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010). Finally, Shaffer *et al.* (2012) highlight that given their international experience, SIEs launch global social networks, they strengthen their know-how skills and they improve their employability upon return to the homeland.

Andresen *et al.* (2012) depict SIEs using roughly the same demographic characteristics. However, they add some job-related features and state that SIEs tend to sign temporary contracts with small companies with a national scope that hire them for their expertise.

Consequently, the individuals may decide to leave their home country, but that decision can either be totally free – triggered by the desire to progress professionally, gain international experience or live an adventure – or compelled by poor economic conditions that make it difficult to find a job or earn a fair amount of money (Tams and Arthur, 2007). This myriad of motives leads to the conclusion that there is not a homogeneous profile of SIE (Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Tams and Arthur, 2007).

The literature gradually unfolds SIEs in terms of their motivation and career prospects, but given the heterogeneity within SIEs (Doherty *et al.*, 2013) the information on the type and relevance of the social networks they maintain and/or establish while at the host country has not been fully explored. Hence, this study explores the composition, diversity and instrumentality of SIEs social networks.

3. Social networks

A social network refers to the relational ties connecting individuals and it is the basis for an individual's social life and career development (Li and Rothstein, 2009). The strength of such ties varies according to how time-consuming, intense, reliable, and reciprocal they are (Granovetter, 1973).

In the context of international mobility, "social networks refer to relational ties between the expatriate and other individuals, such as family, peer expatriates, local working partners, or local friends" (Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2008, p. 33). The interviews conducted by Stroppa and Spieß (2011) revealed yet other actors such as friends, other expatriates, but also supportive organisations. On-line networks are not autonomously addressed. In fact, personal networks are studied the most, specifically characteristics such as size, diversity, localisation, closeness and frequency (Wang and Kanungo, 2004). Undoubtedly, an international assignment expands the expatriate's social network, as Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008) conclude in their conceptual article.

The expatriates' networks have predominantly been characterised so to identify impacts on adjustment and performance (Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2008). By and large, there is a positive correlation between the establishment of social networks and expatriates' outcomes and well-being (Li and Rothstein, 2009; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2008; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011).

Previous findings from Shen and Kram (2011) indicate that while company-assigned expatriates rely heavily on intra-organisational networks, the predominant networks for SIEs are extra-organisational. Van Bakel *et al.* (2011) showed that informal social networks play a major role in cross-cultural transitions. Actually, SIEs report greater cultural adjustment than corporate expatriates (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010), but the existing accounts fail to answer which and how social interactions promote SIEs' settlement.

Concerning the roles performed by these social networks, they have been addressed at former studies, but the focus has been on corporate expatriates rather than SIEs. Crowne and Goeke (2012) summarise the networks' classification as supportive or informational. Li and Rothstein (2009), for instance, present evidence that the social

networks have an impact on expatriate effectiveness through the provision of cultural information and social support. This means that through their contacts the expatriates can decode the expected behaviour in the host country and develop their sense of belonging, respectively. In other words, expatriates obtain useful information to reduce uncertainty regarding the host country's culture through their social networks (Black *et al.*, 1991; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2008).

In a recent study specifically with SIEs, Froesa (2012) makes an attempt to explain the functions of SIEs social interactions. He explores the motivation and cross-cultural adjustment of academics from different nationalities working in South Korea and concludes that "SIEs receive social support and draw satisfactory interaction adjustment from social interactions with fellow nationals or other foreigners" (p.1108). The author recommends further studies on the roles of various SIEs social networks as this finding may not apply to South Korea alone.

This is as far as the literature goes when it comes to describing the composition, the diversity and the roles of international workers' social networks. Regarding the identification of the actors with whom the relationships are established, expatriates tend to socialise with whom they relate more easily and with those who have gone through similar life events (Li and Rothstein, 2009). The nationality emerges as a key feature in the roles of social networks and despite the closeness with home country nationals and other expatriates, host national networks are the main providers for cultural information and social support (Li and Rothstein, 2009).

The research to date has tended to focus on the social networks established by corporate expatriates rather than by SIEs. Most studies provide no evidence to support which network helps SIEs the most, although the signs obtained by the corporate expatriates' literature indicate it is a network blossoming in the host country (Li and Rothstein, 2009). Due to the distance, home country social networks are believed to fade (Wellman and Wortley, 1990 *cit in* Wang and Kanungo, 2004). Moreover, Shen and Kram's interviews (2011) confirm that expatriates get support from more than one source, but the research so far has not indicated the strongest network or network member from the SIEs perspective. Besides, no previous research seems to have adopted a relational and contextual perspective (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013;

Doherty *et al.*, 2013) to address Portuguese SIEs social networks, which is an empirical contribution of this research.

4. Portuguese context: from emigration to self-initiated expatriation

In Portugal, the emigration flows have always been large (Peixoto, 2012) and the tendency over the last few years reinforces how structural emigration is in the Portuguese society (Arroteia, 2010; Peixoto, 2012).

Official data released by INE (2013) confirms the intensification in the emigration flows, including both temporary and permanent movements, although short- or medium-term stays show an increasing proportion. The information made available by official entities is still meagre (Peixoto, 2012), namely regarding temporary emigrants. While permanent emigrants stay abroad for at least twelve months, temporary emigrants have the intention to live in a foreign country for three to twelve months (INE, 2013). The growing economic and social importance of international mobility (INE, 2013) justifies a closer look on these temporary emigrants. On the basis of this mobility growth and given the dimension of the Portuguese communities living abroad (Arroteia, 2010) forming the Portuguese diaspora – 2.5 million Portuguese-born and another 2.5 million Portuguese descendants (Malheiros, 2011) – this study aims to explore who belongs to the social networks of Portuguese SIEs and how important is the Portuguese diaspora within these social networks.

It is acknowledged that today's relocation flows differ from the classic emigration that formed the Portuguese diaspora in terms of their sociodemographic characteristics: the number of Portuguese-born with a university diploma living abroad is growing (Peixoto, 2012). The so called “brain drain” is addressed by international organisations. OECD, for instance, states that in Portugal the emigration rate of highly qualified people is 20% (OECD, 2013b). Most contemporary Portuguese emigrants are young males, despite the fact that women represent now over 40% of the emigrant population. Overall, over 55% are less than 30 years old; seek temporary stays abroad; and have higher academic qualifications (Malheiros, 2011).

The country's economic crisis (Arroteia, 2010), the European identity and citizenship (Luna-Arocas *et al.*, 2001; Malheiros, 2011) and the quest for social mobility (Peixoto, 2012) are highlighted as the causes for today's emigration flows. In fact, data from the *Observatório da Emigração* (2013) confirm that six out of the ten top countries receiving Portuguese emigrants are in Europe. However, new destinations

such as the United Kingdom and Spain coexist with the revival of existing routes to Luxemburg, Germany or Switzerland (Malheiros, 2011). Outside Europe, Africa and Brazil are especially attractive (Peixoto, 2012).

It is possible to translate this official data into management terminology and conclude that the intensification in Portuguese international mobility is particularly felt among SIEs. Peixoto (2012) acknowledges that today's movements are clearly under-researched. Given that the economic crisis may affect SIEs decisions (Doherty *et al.*, 2013), it is relevant to study and record this phenomenon as it happens.

Extant social network research focuses on the consequences of social networks for the expatriates and their assignments, but little attention is paid to the antecedents or the description of the networks themselves. In addition, social network research seldom isolates SIEs. Yet, the specificities of this population, in particular the fact that they are not company-backed, prevent the findings on corporate expatriates' social networks to apply to SIEs and so SIE's networks constitute a required stream of research. Thus, in this study, Portuguese SIEs social networks at the host country are examined by exploring common themes arising from people's discussions of their social relationships abroad. The purpose is to understand SIEs through these accounts, namely through the identification of the actors who compose these social networks; the description of the cultural diversity of these networks, the presence of members of the diaspora; and the description of the roles played by the different networks.

5. Methodology

5.1 Data collection

The semi-structured interview was considered the most suitable procedure so to obtain insights and descriptions on the social networks established by Portuguese SIEs (Rowley, 2012).

The interview script, based on the literature review, encompassed questions regarding the composition, the diversity and the roles of the social networks established and maintained by Portuguese SIEs. Demographic data were also collected.

It was used a non-probability sampling method to target Portuguese SIEs, selected according to the following criteria: (1) being qualified workers who finance their relocation to a country of their choice seeking professional and personal development for an undetermined period of time, and so being temporarily displaced; (2) having Portuguese nationality; (3) being available for at least one interview.

The final set of interviews included thirteen participants. This sample size meets the expectation for new researchers in their first approach of a research topic (Rowley, 2012). The first and the ninth interviews were face-to-face and the remaining eleven were Skype interviews, given the constraints imposed by the geographic dispersion of the interviewees. All interviews were tape-recorded and held in Portuguese from March 2013 to July 2013. The shortest interview took thirty minutes and the longest one lasted one hour and a half. Table 1 summarises participants' demographic characteristics by the time they were interviewed.

Identification	Age	Gender	Marital status	Assignment Tenure (years)	Destination country	Occupation in Portugal	Occupation at the host country
Interviewee 1	33	F	Single	2	Germany	Teacher/Trainer	Teacher/Client Services Adviser
Interviewee 2	24	M	Single	1.4	Spain	Unemployed	Civil Engineer
Interviewee 3	25	M	Single	1.5	Brazil	Unemployed	Civil Engineer

Identification	Age	Gender	Marital status	Assignment Tenure (years)	Destination country	Occupation in Portugal	Occupation at the host country
Interviewee 4	24	M	Single	0.1	Brazil	Unemployed	Civil Engineer
Interviewee 5	34	M	Married with 1 child	5	Republic of Ireland	Pharmacist	Pharmacist
Interviewee 6	32	M	Married	0.9	New Zealand	IT Engineer	IT Engineer
Interviewee 7	54	M	Married with 1 child	0.8	Angola	Out of job Civil Servant	Consultant
Interviewee 8	24	F	Single	0.7	England	Unemployed	Nurse
Interviewee 9	25	F	Single	1.8	France	Unemployed	Nurse
Interviewee 10	33	F	Single	1.5	East Timor	Student Adviser	Teacher/Translator
Interviewee 11	28	M	Single	2.5	Czech Republic	IT Engineer	IT Engineer
Interviewee 12	24	M	Single	0.9	Brazil	Unemployed	Civil Engineer
Interviewee 13	35	M	Married	0.9	Norway	Architect	Architect

Table 1 –Demographics of participants

The interviewees were 24 to 54 years old, the average being 30 years old, and 31% were women. The majority of the interviewees are single. Of the interviewees, seven were unemployed by the time they started the assignment, but they were all performing their occupations at the host country by the time they were interviewed. They worked in civil engineering, nursing, IT engineering, teaching, translation, pharmacy, consultancy and architecture. Seven chose European destinations – Germany, Spain, Republic of Ireland, England, France, Czech Republic and Norway –, but South America, Oceania, Africa and Asia are also represented in the study – Brazil, New Zealand, Angola and East Timor, respectively. The experience as SIEs ranged from a minimum of one month up to a maximum of five years. On average, the participants are displaced for 1.6 years.

5.2 Data analysis

The interviews' transcriptions in Portuguese were imported to *NVivo 10*, a *QSR International* software, and thirteen nodes were created and classified to represent the participants. Attributes and attribute values were then set to organise demographic data: age, gender, marital status, assignment tenure, destination, occupation prior to departure and current occupation.

Content analysis was then performed in a three-fold process, so to reduce any bias in interpretation or classification accuracy. To begin with, data preparation guaranteed that all the verbalisations were thoroughly analysed. Secondly, it was decided to perform content analysis using the thematic and categorical analysis proposed by Bardin (1977), having a set of text as large as the paragraph as the unit of context and the theme as the unit of analysis. Lastly, regarding data coding, the identification of thematic categories resulted from prior theory and research, but additional categories were dynamically unfolded from the data (Rowley, 2012). This process corresponds to a semi-inductive analysis: previous categories exist, whilst the subcategories emerged from the data.

This qualitative approach to the data provided answers to the research questions. Some excerpts from the interviews were translated into English by an accredited professional to illustrate the major findings resulting from the methodological process described hereby, without compromising the confidentiality of all interviewees or data trustworthiness.

6. Research findings

The presentation of the results obtained in this analysis begins with an illustration of the composition of the social networks and the cultural diversity of the social networks, including the Portuguese diaspora. The roles of the social networks are shown afterwards.

6.1 The composition of the social networks

The testimonies regarding the networks maintained by Portuguese SIEs while working abroad reveal the existence of networks based in the home country and networks based in the host country. Within the host country networks, it is noticeable that some of the contacts were initiated while the SIEs were still in Portugal, whilst others are new contacts, started upon arrival. All the networks, whether rooted at home or host country, can be classified under interpersonal or organisational contacts. Organisational contacts are the least representative, with a total of twelve references from nine participants.

Regarding home country networks, the interviewees agree that the family/partner and the friends compose the interpersonal networks based in Portugal, with 61 references each. As far as organisational networks are concerned, apart from one contact established with diplomatic institutions, all the others refer pre-departure contacts with recruitment agencies or host employer companies.

In relation to host country networks, the interpersonal networks encompass close friends, co-workers, acquaintances and partner, with 135, 63, 41 and 12 references, respectively. At the host country, apart from the employer organisation, only two additional organisations emerge from the interviews: one person referred the availability of the union and three people mentioned they had to deal with either Portuguese or host country diplomatic institutions.

All participants report satisfaction regarding their social lives and the male SIE in New Zealand even commented:

...our social rhythm corresponds exactly to what we intended. (32-year-old male, displaced in New Zealand)

One interviewee admits that he does not make efforts to expand his informal social networks and that he is satisfied with a quiet lifestyle. There is also a demographic characteristic that sets him apart from the rest of the sample: at the age of 54 he is the oldest interviewee. One may speculate whether age influences the availability to start new relationships and build new social networks and to what extent this feature explains why SIEs are predominantly young proactive individuals (Doherty, 2012).

Overall, our findings reveal that this group of Portuguese SIEs shares many similarities in terms of network composition. All have networks based in Portugal and in the host country and in each country the networks are structured in interpersonal and organisational networks.

6.2 The cultural diversity of the social networks

As the participants share the same nationality, the cultural diversity is only an issue for host country networks, specifically interpersonal networks.

The cultural diversity is particularly felt among co-workers, with references from twelve interviewees; the only exception is starred by the female SIE in East Timor who is currently a freelance worker. So, the diversity of the network built at professional context is related to the company profile: the four participants who work at multinational corporations have host country and third country colleagues:

I work at an international team, composed by members from several countries...
(Male SIE in Czech Republic)

The five participants who work at national-based companies only interact with host country nationals. Three other interviewees have unique situations because their companies are local, but with a multicultural staff.

The second group with higher cultural diversity is acquaintances. The female SIE living in Germany said that she gets along with the Portuguese because of the familiarity, but the increasing population in her informal networks is third country expatriates. Three other participants report the exact same movement:

I can't tell, but I would say two Portuguese people and then quite a few... many foreigners, other expatriates... (Male SIE in Czech Republic)

The variety of nationalities among acquaintances is due to the two privileged ways of meeting new people: at social events or due to the snowball effect, as the following statement confirms:

One thing that works all the time is friends introducing new friends. (Male SIE in New Zealand)

Two interviewees, however, admit that as they were recruited together with Portuguese colleagues, they still live as a self-sufficient community. Consequently, cultural diversity is not a trace of their interpersonal networks:

The network is now larger because I have co-workers, but at the end of the day everything turns out to be basically between us, the social moments are spent with one another... (Female SIE in France)

There is cultural heterogeneity in the group of closest friends, but that heterogeneity is largely dichotomic because only one participant has third country nationals as close friends. Ten interviewees have Portuguese nationals as best friends and the remaining two have host nationals as best friends.

Finally, a couple of interviewees met romantic partners at host country: one was a host country national from Germany and the other was a third country national from France.

Summing up, all the participants acknowledge that living and working abroad tends to add multiculturalism to their networks.

6.2.1 The Portuguese diaspora

Despite the significance of the Portuguese diaspora supported by the number of Portuguese people living abroad, the participants in this study do not approach the host

Portuguese community. They present two main reasons for their choice. The first reason is the will to adjust to the host country:

...I think that once I am here, I have to melt into the country and not get stuck to Portugal. Therefore, I think that the more we move away from the Portuguese community, the easier it is to our adjustment... (Male SIE in Brazil)

As a second reason they indicate the social differences that grew different generations apart:

...the difference in the academic qualifications causes a significant difference in our lifestyles and the places we attend and the activities we do... (Female SIE living in England)

The male SIE in Norway explains that nowadays the sense of community is not based on a *neighbourhood network* and that thought is corroborated by several participants who admit having registered to on-line Facebook communities, which they consult every now and then. The only dissonant testimony comes from the female SIE in East Timor. Regarding this topic, she says:

...if you want to meet Portuguese people, there is a café to go to. There are preferential places where people get together, so to speak. (Female SIE in East Timor)

The results then show that the interviewees do not consider traditional Portuguese communities as a networking source.

6.3 The roles of the social networks

The interviewees provide several examples of how interpersonal and organisational networks are helpful.

Regarding interpersonal networks based in Portugal, five participants refer the role of the family in the decision to leave Portugal: four decided together with their partners and one admitted the parents' influence. The majority of the participants, however, took the decision to leave Portugal on their own. A male SIE in Brazil, for instance, said:

I decided rapidly that this is what I wanted to do. I think it is the best for me, for my career. (Male SIE in Brazil)

When asked about the current function of the family/partner in Portugal, all participants confirm that this network still matters and that the frequency of contacts has stabilised after an initial intense period, but their role is of mere encouragement, as they add:

...help me in the adjustment, no, I don't think so. (Male SIE in Spain)

A different relationship development is reported when the focus are the friends left behind. The participants seem resigned to the effects of the distance:

...it is notorious that we are growing apart... (Male SIE in Brazil)

Twelve out of the thirteen interviewees commented on this topic; the only interviewee who leaves friends in Portugal out of his speech is precisely the SIE with the shortest experience abroad, one month. This omission may indicate that SIEs' perception on the development of home-based networks changes according to the length of the assignment.

Some participants acknowledge that their lifestyle makes it difficult to maintain regular contacts with the friends in Portugal; others say it is a natural selection and that this experience shows them which friendships will last forever. Another recurrent opinion is that the friends at the host country gain importance in detriment of the friends who stayed in Portugal because of today's life similarity and contact frequency. As a consequence, no specific role is given to friends in Portugal.

Concerning organisational networks, those established during the pre-departure stage with either recruitment agencies or employers led nine out of the thirteen interviewees to leave Portugal with their professional occupation totally defined. In addition to guaranteeing a job, four organisational contacts had further functions, as they provided information regarding legal aspects, housing or even language courses, as proven by the following two statements:

...the company paid for the first house; during the first month and a few days the company lent the house. The house belonged to the company. (Male SIE in New Zealand)

...all the companies offered the trip, housing, handled the paperwork and some companies even offered a free French course. Although I have already attended three French courses, I felt the need to learn more. And so I chose the company that offered the course. (Female SIE in France)

The role of the Portuguese diplomatic institution mentioned by one interviewee was merely informational.

Among host country based interpersonal networks, the data reveal the importance of the role played by the personal contacts activated by the participants prior to departure and then maintained or even intensified at the host country. They were crucial not to help SIEs decide whether to go abroad, but to help them decide where to go and obtain practical information. It is clear from the data that all participants had one main contact, one connection, that they consider the most helpful, thus becoming the strongest network member:

As a matter of fact, she made it much easier to understand and fit in the so called Norwegian culture, indeed, and in many different aspects I would be completely lost without this background. (Male SIE in Norway)

The female SIE in East Timor provides a more detailed description:

So I came, I had some backup here, anyhow... I was privileged in East Timor because a Timorese family that I've met in Portugal in the past...gave me shelter and I lived with them during the first three months until I have figured this out, settle in, find my own place...they explained everything to me. In fact, they were extremely careful with me... (Female SIE in East Timor)

This anchor contact differs in terms of familiarity and nationality among the interviewees: three SIEs had host country friends/acquaintances, one had a Portuguese friend that once lived at the host country, five had Portuguese friends/acquaintances already living at the host country, one had a family member at the host country, one had European co-workers and two had Portuguese friends moving along with them. For a SIE in Brazil and the SIE in New Zealand, these contacts started out on-line. All but the main contact of the SIE in Germany live at host country. Still, all the participants agree on the relevance of these contacts as they provide settlement support and useful information and advice. Table 2 summarises these data.

Identification	Knot	Knot role – illustrative quotations
SIE in Germany	Portuguese friend	<i>[She gave me tips] at different levels, how to look for a house, etc...</i>
SIE in Spain	Host country friend	<i>...that friend picked me up by car and I stayed a couple of days at her place. Then we came here a day before New Year's Eve so that I could find a house...</i>
SIE in Brazil	Host country acquaintance	<i>He was always a great guy, in fact he picked me up at the airport, which was totally unexpected, but had a huge impact on me.</i>
SIE in Brazil	Portuguese friend	<i>I've sent my CV in advance to D. and he sent it to a couple of places, so I first came here to attend interviews. Then one day one of his suppliers said he needed an engineer and he recommended me.</i>
SIE in Republic of Ireland	Family member	<i>...she helped me, for instance, on how to apply for the social security card...what to do, where to go, which documents to take... In addition, she introduced me to some of her Portuguese friends...</i>
SIE in New Zealand	Portuguese acquaintances	<i>..the main advantage we've with this couple is that we speak Portuguese whenever we meet them, we are culturally closer to them than to anybody else...</i>

Identification	Knot	Knot role – illustrative quotations
SIE in Angola	Spanish and Italian co-workers	<i>...going to the bank and figuring out how that works and how to withdraw money and deal with the paperwork,... even the driving, the rules, how to deal with the policemen...</i>
SIE in England	Portuguese friends moving simultaneously	<i>It is much harder to establish new contacts or to make friends on my own. The presence of another person, or in this case a huge group of people, makes it much easier, especially because we share the same language.</i>
SIE in France	Portuguese friends moving simultaneously	<i>And we know that there is always someone there for us, we can always count on someone who is going through the exact same situation, we get home and there is someone in, and so on.</i>
SIE in East Timor	Timorese family	<i>...at first I got along with the people introduced by that couple who received me, their family, their friends.</i>
SIE in Czech Republic	Portuguese friend	<i>I knew this guy who happens to be Portuguese and he also lives here and he also helped me a lot when I arrived. I even stayed at his place when I arrived...</i>
SIE in Brazil	Portuguese friend	<i>...it was my first time in Brazil, I knew nothing about Brazil, I had a terrible opinion about Brazil, so, having someone here who offered me a place to stay and who told me “look, if you want to get a job you’d better do this, this and this” ...</i>
SIE in Norway	Portuguese friend	<i>There is always the language issue and when we deal with governmental institutions, they don't use English... This is just an example of how easier it was because she was there for me.</i>

Table 2 - Characterisation of the predominant contacts

In general, the role played by these contacts includes simple, but meaningful gestures such as picking the SIEs up at the airport, up to significant arrangements: accommodation, tips on job seeking and explanation about legal procedures. Such connections were then specially relevant for those who did not have a job. In addition, this is often a rhizomatic contact enabling the SIE to make new friends.

As for the new networks, the emphasis goes to the role of the co-workers. The only two interviewees that mention a professional impact from the co-workers share the

same occupation, as nurses. Here is a clarifying statement from a female SIE in England:

Concerning technical procedures that are performed here and not in Portugal, bureaucratic procedures related to the daily documentation and with the registration of all the actions we take, cultural differences [how to approach the patients], the language too, they call our attention to small things... (Female SIE in England)

The remaining testimonies refer that co-workers are a source of information on daily aspects of the host country:

I think that when I learn the most about the culture here is during the day, at work, because that's where I am confronted with the differences between my culture and theirs; for example, when we get all stressed over something to solve and wanna fix it immediately they laugh at us, tell us to calm down, there's no need to rush, everything is going to work out just fine, there's no need to hurry things up. I have to face that Brazilian way at work; do you know what I mean? (Male SIE in Brazil)

The speeches imply how important the professional context is for the SIEs; as for word frequency, “work” is the third most used noun in the set of the thirteen interviewees, right after “people” and “Portugal”, whose high frequency may be explained by the theme under discussion. Given the time spent at work per week, the intensity of these contacts is considered high, so the SIEs admit strengthening bonds with co-workers:

Our only reality here, which is common to most of our co-workers, is the work reality, or at least it is the primary reality, so it is much easier to meet people there than somewhere else. (Male SIE in New Zealand)

In a few cases, the colleagues are now considered friends whom the SIEs meet outside work as well. The participants do not make a particular distinction between the host national co-workers and the third country co-workers in terms of information provision.

According to the opinions collected, the acquaintances met at host country do not play a determinant role in the SIEs' lives, apart from keeping company during social moments.

As for the two relationships with partners met at host country, only one interviewee mentions the relevance of such relationship and relates it to the improvement of her language skills. The fact that these two relationships were not highlighted in their speech might be due to the fact that they no longer exist. The remaining single interviewees do not mention such a network, which may be explained by their recent arrival to the host country.

Concerning the organisational networks based in the host country, the SIEs who had their professional occupations previously defined started working shortly after arriving at the host country, so they deal with the employer organisation at this stage:

...the moment we got to the hospital, there was a welcoming programme by Portuguese colleagues who worked there for over a year and that reception included information shared by a Portuguese colleague on what we ought to do to become legal, where to go, how to get there, simple things like this, but that can make our lives more difficult if we don't know where they are. (Female SIE in England)

In addition to welcoming the newcomers, the employer organisation is a privileged context to expand SIEs' social networks.

Further organisations, such as the union or diplomatic institutions, were merely used to solve administrative matters.

While reflecting upon their expatriation, some of the participants reported having on-line networks, as they used the internet to establish preliminary contacts. The male SIE in New Zealand summarises his experience in few words:

Honestly, 100% of my stay here is due to LinkedIn...all the processes, everything was dealt through LinkedIn. (Male SIE in New Zealand)

And he goes on explaining that this on-line tool was helpful to find a job opportunity and to get in touch with the Portuguese couple who represents the main knot in his networks and whom he asked, for instance, about places to live. Similarly, three other participants used on-line tools – Facebook, e-mail and InterNations – to explore new contacts. These results draw attention to the role of on-line resources; further researches on this topic alone may reveal whether on-line networks shall be treated autonomously under the scope of international mobility.

Additional statements describe the internet as instrumental to gather information about the destination and thus moderate the expectations; checking websites is often a complement to either organisational or interpersonal contacts, but no new networks emerge from such on-line searches:

The only resource I used was simply internet, because...for example, I knew in advance where I was going to work, so I used it to get to know the city, which buses, which city areas, that was it. (Male SIE in Republic of Ireland)

The three participants who used the internet the least had paid previous visits to the destination, which may explain their reduced interest in learning more about the destination.

It is worth mentioning that eleven participants refer to their own experience and observation as the sources of information to figure out the host country's *modus vivendi*. In other words, they say that it is not all about the people they meet, the organisations they contact or the researches they do; the learning process at the host country has a component of solitude. The female SIE in Germany summarises this idea as follows:

At the end of the day, it is all about learning by comparing this one with my own country. (Female SIE in Germany)

These SIEs feel that it is their responsibility to make it work and find their way around the new setting, so she adds:

...for better or worse I am all alone and in order to survive I have to be independent. (Female SIE in Germany)

The results based upon data from the interviews show that Portuguese SIEs can obtain both support and information (Crowne and Goeke, 2012) from their networks.

7. Discussion

This research describes the networks established by Portuguese SIEs, their composition, diversity and functions. Thirteen interviews were conducted among graduate Portuguese workers who chose to start or continue their careers at a foreign destination for an undetermined period of time.

In terms of sociodemographic profile, these SIEs correspond roughly to prior literature descriptions, as the majority is young – the age average is thirty years old –, childless – only one interviewee had children when the assignment began – and male – 69% of the sample (Andresen *et al.*, 2012; Malheiros, 2011; Shaffer *et al.*, 2012).

However, unlike Shaffer *et al.* (2012) whose meta-analysis indicated that the host country's reputation is a determinant for the destination choice, this group of SIEs had chosen their destination according to their preference or according to the professional opportunities offered by host countries. Also related is the fact that SIEs decide to go to a destination where they can count on someone willing to help in the transition.

As mentioned in the literature review, little is known about the social networks maintained or initiated by SIEs. The results emerging from the data contrast home-based and host-based networks. Within each context there are interpersonal networks and organisational networks. However, as the use of internet is mentioned by some interviewees as a resource to collect information or meet people, the results of this research suggest the need for an autonomous study on on-line networks.

In Portugal, interpersonal networks are composed by family/partner and friends and organisational networks include diplomatic institutions and recruitment agencies. In turn, in the host country, interpersonal networks are formed by close friends, co-workers, acquaintances and partner and organisational networks comprise employer companies, diplomatic institutions and a union. It is noticeable that interpersonal networks in the host country are formed by a wider range of members, which may be explained by the fact that the SIEs' professional activity is performed at the host country and also by the distinction between friends and acquaintances that may reveal different stages of network building.

This study reveals that one network member is intentionally contacted and kept throughout the assignment, corresponding to the person who helped SIEs the most at the

preparation, arrival and life at the new country. For this particular purpose SIEs shape their social networks according to their interests (Johnson *et al.*, 2003). The most significant networks in terms of number of members, volume of information and frequency of contacts correspond to the professional and social contexts where SIEs now belong.

Findings from Shen and Kram (2011) indicated differences in the company-assigned and the self-initiated expatriates' networks because while company-assigned expatriates rely heavily on intra-organisational networks, the predominant networks for SIEs are extra-organisational. According to our findings SIEs report how helpful and present their co-workers were.

This finding raises the question of whether SIEs do rely on intra-organisational networks, thus becoming closer to what corporate expatriates experience. Quite often, SIEs who sought and found a professional opportunity abroad while still living in Portugal also count on their new organisations to help them with the main arrangements, so valuable intra-organisational networks are not exclusive of corporate expatriates.

The results in terms of networks' composition are similar with those of studies focused on corporate expatriates, which suggest that SIEs establish relational ties with family, working partners, friends and organisations (Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2008; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). For these SIEs in particular, as far as the composition of social networks is concerned, there is a difference between friends and acquaintances.

Regarding diversity, the social networks of this group of Portuguese SIEs cannot be framed within the dichotomy established by Li and Rothstein (2009) because in addition to the relationship with locals and fellow Portuguese people at the host country, third country nationals are also part of the interpersonal networks, namely with co-workers and acquaintances. There is merely one case of third country nationals among SIEs' closest friends. Yet, interviewees emphasise the closeness of the relationship rather than the nationality of their contacts. At the host country, expatriates tend to socialise with whom they relate more easily and with those who have gone through similar life events (Li and Rothstein, 2009). The results of this study support this conclusion because SIEs either maintain or intensify their relationships with whom

they already knew, regardless of the nationality, and they feel close to other expatriates, regardless of their nationality as well.

It is commonly accepted that SIEs receive less organisational support and that the presence of Portuguese counterparts at the host country might be a pull factor and a source of social interaction. It is interesting to note that the traditional Portuguese community is not referred as a current network. The interviewees quite often refer to themselves as emigrants, but they keep a distance from other Portuguese emigrants because they believe that they would never fit, although nobody referred the fear of being seen with the same stereotyped image (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013) as former emigrants. Most interviewees corroborate the position expressed by Van Bakel *et al.* (2011) that insisting in the relationships with co-nationals may keep the expatriate apart and prevent a genuine cross-cultural adjustment.

It is questionable whether these findings are specific from this group of research participants or whether they express a common trend among contemporary Portuguese SIEs, in their relationships with the Portuguese diaspora. Also, it is arguable whether this trend is common across countries, or whether there are differences according to the social status and prestige allocated to the Portuguese diaspora at the destination.

Nevertheless, all SIEs who had Portuguese connections as their strongest network knot report the intensification of that closeness, which might be explained by the easiness in the relationship, as clarified above.

As far as the networks' roles are concerned, the current study draws attention to the fact that the host country connections consistently gain significance while the networks kept at the home country decrease in intensity.

In line with findings from Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2008), the networks in Portugal have no significant effect on cultural information or on social support. Prior studies have also noted that long-distance relationships do not provide the immediate response an expatriate requires in the local context (Shen and Kram, 2011; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). Still, it remains unclear whether reducing the role of home country networks to an encouraging part is actually a coping skill, so that SIEs can bear the distance better and ease their adjustment to the destination, or whether it is actually a trace of contemporary SIEs.

Taken together, these results suggest that the richest networks are the ones operating in the host country.

Hence, it is likely that suggestions from Johnson *et al.* (2003) apply to these SIEs as well: social bonds with other expatriates provide greater social support, but roughly the same amount of information than those with host country nationals. The findings enhance the belief that also SIEs get support from more than one source (Shen and Kram, 2011).

The SIEs take the initiative to relocate, some leave the country when they have a job offer abroad and others look for a job once they arrive at the destination. In both cases, their organisational contacts do not dominate the networks web. The choice for a specific destination is based on the existence of a personal contact capable of welcoming the SIE at the host country; others choose the destination where a job opportunity has been offered to them and then carry out intentional contacts. The interviews reveal that there are Portuguese people in all destinations, but the existence of this *comfort zone* is not what attracts the SIE to a given destination. This study shows that all SIEs have one prevailing contact, someone who is nowadays a member of an interpersonal network, but with whom they got in touch while still in Portugal. Such contacts are both supportive and informational because they clarify the SIEs' doubts, give advice and provide a relational context. It is then considered the strongest knot, responsible for smoothing the SIEs' transition to a new culture. Surprisingly, such knot is never part of the traditional Portuguese diaspora, which corroborates former research from Barnard and Pendock (2013) on the importance of the emotions in the development of supportive and close relationships among the homeland members.

On the one hand, this evidence reveals existing research gaps: there is no explanation to why Portuguese SIEs deliberately avoid the diaspora as a social resource and there is no analysis to what extent the social classification as "Portuguese immigrants" causes social damage at the host country or reduces their chances of receiving social support from the locals and thus climb the social and the professional ladders. On the other hand, the current study adds novelty to what is known about Portuguese SIEs as it reveals how aware SIEs are regarding their own attitude towards relocation, even when they have relational ties to other individuals.

8. Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to describe the networks established by Portuguese SIEs and three questions guided the research process so to understand the composition, diversity and roles of such social networks.

SIEs build and maintain home and host social networks, being host social networks the dominant ones. In each country, the networks are either interpersonal or organisational. In Portugal, the network members are family/partner, friends, recruitment agencies and diplomatic institutions. Abroad, the network members are close friends, co-workers, acquaintances, partner, employer companies, diplomatic institutions and unions.

Host social networks tend to be diverse in terms of nationality, quantity and roles, which points to the heterogeneity of self-initiated assignees (Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Tams and Arthur, 2007). It seems safe to conclude, however, that the Portuguese diaspora is not a source of information or support for contemporary SIEs. Further research may explore what enables or prevents SIEs from using the diaspora as a social resource. Another finding of this research is that social networks kept at the host country are stronger than the social networks at the home country. This study has found that generally Portuguese SIEs have one main element in the social networks and its presence is constant from the pre-departure stage onwards. However, the interviewees tend to agree that one size does not fit all, as what worked for one SIE in terms of network building may not be what a different SIE, a different individual, needs.

All in all, the present study provides additional evidence with respect to SIEs, particularly Portuguese SIEs. Consequently, this study gives a theoretical contribution by providing empirical evidence on Portuguese SIEs, who have been understudied.

This theoretical contribution is marked by Portugal's economic crisis, so this study may suffer the influence of such a specific moment in the country's history (Doherty *et al.*, 2013). Even so, the study offers a practical contribution for employers wishing to play the competition for global talent because it explores the composition, diversity and roles of Portuguese SIEs social networks, providing valuable information to help designing differentiating management policies (Doherty, 2012). Human resources policies and practices can foster personal well-being and ease the transfer to a

different country, contributing for a high performance in the minimum possible time (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010). In general, the interviewees assume that their social networks include the employer organisation and the co-workers. According to these testimonies, these networks can provide, respectively, logistic and legal support, technical and cultural information. This suggests that the employer organisations can develop specific welcoming programs to assist SIEs in their first days at host country – which is believed to improve social support – and to foster the interaction between SIEs and their colleagues – which in turn is believed to improve cultural information (Li *et al.*, 2009).

Finally, the information on composition, diversity and roles of Portuguese SIEs social networks is also a contribution for future Portuguese SIEs and their anticipatory adjustment (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010). In particular, these results indicate that the SIE's attitude can influence the composition of the social networks. Social networks are then another domain where SIEs' self-directedness (Doherty, 2012; Lo *et al.*, 2012) and personality (Johnson *et al.*, 2003) seem determinant to the transition process. The interviews also show that it is common to have one main contact responsible for providing settlement support and information. One can admit that such prevailing contact may be found within the Portuguese diaspora, now that it is reinforced by contemporary SIEs. Hence, it is recommended that SIEs take the Portuguese diaspora into consideration as a networking source. The results also suggest that SIEs shall expect their home country networks to be weaker than host country networks.

This research is marked by its limitations. Firstly, data saturation was not reached with the number of participants interviewed, thirteen. Secondly, this qualitative study requests for a large-scale research to analyse if these findings are corroborated by a larger sample. Lastly, this research focused on Portuguese nationals alone, which constrains the transferability of the results to SIEs from different nationalities.

Further studies could be conducted to develop the research lines discussed. The characterisation of these networks opens avenues of research on the antecedents and the outcomes of these networks. Future studies could also take into account questions that have not been asked in this study, namely whether the duration of the expatriation influences the various networks in terms of composition and roles or whether the existence of previous expatriation experiences determines how the networks are built.

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